United Nations E/CN.6/2015/NGO/262

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
4 January 2015
English
Original: French

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-ninth session
9-20 March 2015
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Institut Jules-Destrée, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

14-66616 (E) 060215

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Statement

The Fourth World Conference on Women, which took place in Beijing in September 1995, resulted in a Declaration and Platform for Action that continues to guide the research and work of women throughout the world. The concept of solidarity is present throughout the document, in particular with regard to combating the increase in poverty and the need to promote the advancement and empowerment of women in order to move forward into the future (p. 2); it provides solutions for economic growth and development (p. 9) and must be strengthened among women through information, education and sensitization activities (p. 83).

The Millennia2025 Solidarity-Women project aims to give women in vulnerable situations greater access to common goods in order to improve their daily life and, consequently, that of their children also. It is implemented by the Institut Jules-Destrée and the Millennia2025 Women and Innovation Foundation under the Millennia2015 plan of action for women's empowerment and gender equality, developed with the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Multiple forms of inequality exist between men and women, including in relation to salaries, employment, rights, education, professional advancement and health. Violence against women and girls is one of the scourges of our society, owing to war, conflict, natural disasters, the economic situation and, unfortunately, the foolishness of men and sometimes of women.

Millennia2015 has applied a foresight methodology in its work since 2007 with a view to achieving its goal by 2025, because the situation is extremely urgent for women and girls, who are abused at all levels in too many countries and regions of the world. The vision is to set society in motion by using scientific tools to understand the past, analyse the present and build the future, optimizing opportunities to reach the objectives established. One of the strengths of that methodology is that it involves all stakeholders, from civil society to decision-makers, from research centres to companies. We have set up a large network of men and women who are concerned about women's empowerment and gender equality. Even in the countries and regions most affected by obscurantism, men are working alongside women to ensure equal rights. The Millennia2025 international network of voluntary researchers comprises 70 per cent women and 30 per cent men.

We have observed a trend among women in the analyses conducted for Millennia2015: they do not come across as victims but as fighters. They are emerging as leaders in their respective life contexts. They are putting all their energy into addressing their situation and building a better future, for themselves and for their children. Their will and creativity are an engine that gives us inspiration, and we wanted to contribute to their projects by giving them a voice.

Assessment of the strategic axes of Millennia2015 brought to light a fundamental concept: that of solidarity. As a result, Millennia2025 Solidarity-Women is structured as a model that can be replicated at the level of the European Commission, the francophone countries, the developing countries and the United Nations. One of the missions of Millennia2025 Solidarity-Women is to help its beneficiaries become the leaders of their own lives and step up their role in achieving empowerment. Financial assistance is therefore a short-term measure rather than a long-term objective. To achieve our goals, it is vital to generate a

citizens' solidarity fund that will enable the beneficiaries to obtain goods and services from suppliers at a discounted rate.

In order to gain more information on poverty, we are working on a comprehensive study on the situation of vulnerable women, with a view to documenting the Millennia2025 Solidarity-Women project. We call on all to contribute. The various parties involved in and interacting through the project are the suppliers of goods and services, the women beneficiaries, civil society and all stakeholders, including financial partners.

By "beneficiaries", we mean women in vulnerable situations:

- Single mothers (single-parent families) living below the poverty line;
- Poor female workers: part-time work that is not valued and does not enable the worker to escape poverty. Women are those most affected by this issue;
- Female jobseekers: there is striking inequality in access to employment. The rate of employment is much lower among women than it is among men;
- Women over 65 years of age: older persons, particularly women, face a relatively high risk of poverty;
- Migrant women: An increasing number of migrants are women. Furthermore, female migrants are subject to both cultural and gender-based stereotyping, which results in discrimination in employment; this in turn places them in a poor position in the job market, regardless of the qualifications they have obtained in their country of origin. This situation makes such women particularly vulnerable economically;
- Women with disabilities: with a particularly low average income, they suffer twofold discrimination, both as women and as persons with disabilities. They are forced to bear significant health-care costs, are restricted in their daily activities and are often confronted with an environment that is not adapted to their disability.

With regard to providers of goods and services, we have selected those whose services or resources are essential for everyday life but are not equally available to women in vulnerable situations (owing, among other things, to energy-related inequality and insecurity and health-related inequality):

- Electricity/gas: to guarantee access for women in vulnerable situations, particularly single mothers, so that they can manage their own daily life and that of their families;
- Water: to ensure access to water, a fundamental need for the well-being of single mothers and their families;
- Internet/telephone: to ensure that vulnerable women have access to the Internet and information technology so that they can more easily carry out administrative tasks, look for work and training, achieve social integration, ensure an education for their children, make contact with distant family members, access the outside world and access telemedicine in order to address their health problems;

- Companies supplying ergonomic equipment: to adapt the environment for women with disabilities and vulnerable older women by providing them with equipment for their care and well-being, at a discounted rate;
- Insurance companies: to establish solidarity-based contracts for the various forms of insurance required for the daily life of vulnerable women and their children;
- Mutual insurance schemes and social welfare centres: to help identify specific needs and structure a Millennia2025 solidarity fund for vulnerable women.

Millennia2025 Solidarity-Women has the following objectives:

- To increase women's access to high-quality socioeconomic activities that combine performance, efficiency, equity, sustainability and social responsibility. The same measures could be implemented in other public policy areas, again on the basis of the concept of providing access to common goods, including health care, mutual insurance schemes, banking services, information technology and the Internet, electricity, water, food and family-related purchases;
- To support women in vulnerable situations, to help them escape poverty and to empower them as leaders of their own future and that of their children;
- To generate educational competitiveness and the mobilization of citizens in solidarity in order to optimize family resources, empower women and ensure gender equality.

Online, we list a number of questions to help formulate recommendations, anticipate possible flaws or risks and build the project on a long-term basis, so that it can be reproduced in various countries or regions. Partners can interact at various levels in order to formalize our partnership arrangements. The project will be implemented from 2015 with our international partners under the leadership of the volunteer team steered by Marie-Anne Delahaut, Director of Research at the Institut Jules-Destrée and founding president and CEO of the Millennia2025 Women and Innovation Foundation, a registered charity based in Namur (Wallonia, Belgium).

We call for the involvement of UN-Women, the Commission on the Status of Women, member organizations and networks promoting women's empowerment and gender-equality, in order to mobilize partnerships that involve not only potential beneficiaries but also potential financial partners or sponsors and suppliers of goods and services. The support of political institutions and figures will help to firmly establish the project, thus making it possible to kick-start the process of improving the status of women in vulnerable situations and to move towards a change in attitudes, which is vital if women are to escape poverty. We are counting on your support!